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C O N F I D E N T I A L ULAANBAATAR 000097

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [MG](#)  
SUBJECT: 45 DAYS AND COUNTING: MONGOLIA'S PRESIDENTIAL  
ELECTION KICKS OFF

REF: A. ULAANBAATAR 087  
[1](#)B. ULAANBAATAR 073

Classified By: Acting PolOff Christopher J. Anderson for Reasons 1.4 B  
and D.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Both the Mongolian People's Revolutionary  
Party (MPRP) and Democratic Party (DP) have officially  
selected their candidates for the May 24 presidential  
election. Incumbent President N. Enkhbayar is the MPRP  
nominee and Ts. Elbegdorj is the DP candidate. The Green  
Party and the Civil Will Party have opted to forego fielding  
their own candidates and have formally agreed to support the  
DP. The consensus view among analysts is that Enkhbayar will  
win in a close election with high turn-out. However, the DP  
is optimistic and eager to avenge the hotly disputed  
parliamentary elections of last summer. One concern that the  
DP raises, as it has in the past, is that Russia is lurking  
in the shadows to support a continued MPRP presidency. End  
Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Mongolia's presidential campaign is off and running,  
with both the MPRP and DP selecting their official candidates  
in their respective party conferences late last week.  
Incumbent President Enkhbayar was first to declare his  
candidacy after winning 100 percent support from his party.  
Several other candidates, including current Prime Minister S.  
Bayar, were reported to have considered challenging Enkhbayar  
for the nomination, but in the end did not formally declare  
their candidacies. Apart from Bayar, Minister of Justice and  
Home Affairs Ts. Nyamdorj, Speaker of the Parliament D.  
Demberel, former President N. Bagabandi, and several other  
leading MPRP officials were rumored to have been interested.  
Enkhbayar managed to secure unanimous consent despite polls  
showing that only 44 percent of the population believes the  
country is heading in the right direction.

MPRP Titans Avoid Clash  
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[1](#)3. (C) Bayar's ex-wife, now an active DP member but still  
close to key MPRP leaders, told us that Bayar and Enkhbayar  
had a private meeting to resolve the dispute. Based on their  
comments, she said it looked like the two MPRP heavyweights  
may have reached a compromise where Bayar would support  
Enkhbayar in this campaign in exchange for Enkhbayar's  
support for Bayar's legislative agenda and for his candidacy  
if he eventually runs for president in 2013. At the same  
time, Bayar has been a very strong Prime Minister  
politically, and many observers note a shift in domestic  
political power from the presidency to the PM's office (see  
reftels for additional information). Given Bayar's recent

statements about legislative plans to further curtail the role of the president, he may have indicated his interest in running for the Presidency as a way to extract concessions or support from a politically weakened president.

#### DP Recycles Familiar Face

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¶4. (SBU) For the Democratic Party, Ts. Elbegdorj, Harvard-educated and one of the founders of Mongolia's democratic opposition, saw off a challenge from E. Bat-Uul, another one of the original members of the democratic opposition, to win 65 percent of the vote at the DP nominating conference. The DP appears to have selected Elbegdorj based on his perceived electability and ability to compete against Enkhbayar.

¶5. (SBU) Elbegdorj is an experienced politician, having served previously as Prime Minister and DP Chairman. His April 2006 to September 2008 party chairmanship ended in resignation after widespread dissatisfaction with his response to the disputed June 2008 parliamentary elections. He was a vocal critic of those elections, and later opposed the formation of the current coalition government.

¶6. (SBU) The Green Party and the Civil Will Party, the only other parties with seats in parliament (and therefore eligible to field presidential candidates) have formally agreed to support the DP and campaign together. COMMENT: While the two parties only represent two seats in parliament, the current division of parliament understates their strength. The various opposition parties fielded competing candidates in many of the same districts in the last parliamentary election, thereby splitting the opposition vote. The creation of a unified opposition coalition could increase the DP's chances significantly. END COMMENT

¶7. (C) Both parties have established their campaign committees. The MPRP appointed Prime Minister (and MPRP Chairman) Bayar as chairman of the central commission of the Presidential election campaign. Secretary General U. Khurelsukh will serve as campaign manager. Khurelsukh has a fearsome reputation as a political fighter and is rumored to have a newfound loyalty to Enkhbayar after the President reportedly helped him overturn a corruption conviction. Although nearly impossible to substantiate, rumors allege that the President arranged the initial conviction after Khurelsukh critiqued Enkhbayar's wife's influence in the party and as a demonstration of his remaining political strength. For the DP, First Deputy Prime Minister (and party chairman) ¶N. Altankhuyag will lead Elbegdorj's campaign, with Secretary General D. Erdenebat appointed as General Manager of the campaign. COMMENT: The active involvement of the top two GOM officials and other party leaders in the election campaign may hamper the government's activities through election day on May 24. END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) The final results of the election should be submitted to Parliament by June 24, a month after voters go to the polls. The General Election Commission (GEC) has requested clarifications from the Supreme Court on certain clauses regarding resolving disputed elections. The GEC, in collaboration with the National Center for Civil Registration, has established a working group to finalize voting lists in an effort to reduce the possibility of disputes after the election.

#### Geopolitics Never Rest

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¶9. (C) At an April 9 meeting, leading DP Member of Parliament ¶Z. Enkhbold, also serving as Elbegdorj's campaign finance chairman, told us that the Russians are considering active engagement in the election in an effort to help the MPRP. According to Enkhbold, the Russians see the DP as "U.S.-friendly," and they want Enkhbayar to continue on in office. He said that leading MPRP members are working on a possible mid-May visit by Russian PM Putin. While the visit

would not be publicly defined as election-related, Enkhbold made clear that the single purpose would be to raise support for Enkhbayar. Enkhbold stressed that this information is not yet public, however, because the MPRP and Russians are trying to determine if it will actually help Enkhbayar, or instead backfire by drawing criticism that he and the MPRP are too easily influenced by their northern neighbor. To answer these questions, Enkhbold said that the Russians are financing a team of polling experts to talk with the public and inform the decision. As a final thought, Enkhbold stressed that the DP does not have the financial muscle to compete with such Russian support, and is looking to allies (read: the U.S.) to support the democratic process in Mongolia. COMMENT: The MPRP-Moscow nexus is a familiar picture that the DP draws in meetings with Western diplomats, usually accompanied by efforts to secure financial or campaign support in one form or another. END COMMENT.

#### Electoral Context

¶10. (U) According to a recent research report by the Asia Foundation, 84 percent of the electorate is expected to participate despite general low expectations about the fairness of the elections. Only 41 percent of the electorate believes the election will be free and fair. The report further suggests that public opinion about the country's future seems to leave an opening for the opposition. Only 44 percent of those polled believes the country is heading in the right direction and 57 percent express dissatisfaction with the current MPRP-dominated coalition government. Those who fear the country is headed in the wrong direction generally expect poverty and unemployment to get worse. There is a definite urban/rural split, with the urban electorate more skeptical about the fairness of the elections.

#### Comment

¶11. (C) Early political punditry is focused on the selection of Elbegdorj, and if his more confrontational style increases the possibility of further public unrest if there is any significant evidence of election tampering. The situation is not helped by the Supreme Court's and the General Election Commission's continued failure to develop clear procedures for resolving disputed elections. Furthermore, while the Presidency is in some ways a ceremonial position, it retains significant influence in international relations, as Commander-in-Chief, and as chair and one-third of the voting membership of the National Security Council. At present, the NSC, comprised of the President, Speaker of Parliament, and Prime Minister is fully MPRP. While the DP is currently in a coalition government, it does not hold any of the key positions. A win in this election would therefore greatly increase the DP's influence by providing them this key gatekeeper position. END COMMENT.

MINTON